Let us behold: The “Beholding” Summary

By: Jisu Pang

In Rosemarie Garland-Thomson’s “Beholding,” she discusses how people are attracted to stare at things or people that are different and how people need realize the rare beauty in what they stare at. Everyone is a starer, whether you are a baby or an adult. Rosemarie Garland-Thomson concludes how staring is natural because our eyes are attracted to “sights that stimulate” (199). She believes that people should not question what they would stare “but rather how” they should stare (199). She believes starees should question how they will be stared at (199). Garland-Thomson mentions Susan Sontag, a cultural critic, and how she believes staring is a “one-way dynamic” (199). Sontag believes that people tend to stare at “repulsive attractions” because that is what interests them (200). People have an urge to stare at pain, discomfort and “someone else’s misfortune” (200). The author argues that beauty is not what attracts people to stare, but the attraction to stare makes the staree beautiful (200). This is what is referred to the article many times as “rare beauty” (201). Harriet McBryde Johnson, a survivor of a muscle-wasting disease, is stared at everyday because of how she looks. People look at her and feel sympathy when she lives her life happily and fully with no self-pity. She is the rare beauty Garland-Thomson mentions in the article because you cannot help but look at Johnson on the street but when you do actually see her, she is beautiful. She believes her life is worth living even though she gets strange stares and mean comments. Since she views herself differently from what others view her, she puts herself in the public eye. She is practicing visual activism, which is to look, think and act (205) just like Matuschka, a woman has scars like Johnson did. Garland-Thomson says the section about Johnson and Matuschka because she wants to show how people are not afraid to show their disability. People need to stop assuming that people with disabilities cannot hold a life together, or that they are unhappy. The article discusses about how people view things in a negative way when they could be in a positive way. Johnson and Matuschka show how people with disabilities should embrace their disabilities to show the world how to stare at rare beauties.

Davis, Lennard J. "Beholding." *The Disability Studies Reader*. New York: Routledge, 2010. Print.